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A FREE EUROPE

BEING AN INTERVIEW WITH

The Rt. Hon.

SIR EDWARD GREY, Bart., K.G.

British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

BY

EDWARD PRICE BELL

of the "Chicago Daily News."



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Interview with Sir Edward Grey.

The Rt. Hon. Sir Edward Grey, K.G., M.P., British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, talking with Mr. Edward Price Bell, of the *Chicago Daily News*, at luncheon in the Statesman's temporary London home, on Monday, April 10, said substantially this:—

“Prussian tyranny over Western Europe, including these islands, our people will not stand. The pledges given by Mr. Asquith as regards the restoration of Belgium and Serbia shall be kept. We have signed a pact to make peace only in concert with our Allies; this pact, I need not say, we shall honour, strictly, and to the end. What we and our Allies are fighting for is a free Europe. We want a Europe free, not only from the domination of one nationality by another, but from hectoring diplomacy and the peril of war, free from the constant rattling of the sword in the scabbard from perpetual talk of shining armour and warlords. In fact,” added Sir Edward reflectively, “we feel we are fighting for equal rights; for law, justice, peace; for civilization, throughout the world, as against brute force which knows no restraint and no mercy.”

To interview Sir Edward Grey, one need hardly say, is a unique privilege and honour. These came to myself after many months of battling with the immemorial prejudice of the British public man of high responsibility against the journalist as a journalist. It is a fact, I believe, that Sir Edward Grey—one of the greatest figures of the world war, and one of the most famous men in modern political history—never was interviewed, in the journalistic sense, before. It is also true, I think, that in the long annals of the British Foreign Office this is the first instance in which its Chief has consented to speak to his fellow-men through the mediumship of a correspondent.

What is the most amazing fact about this man ?

To my mind, it is that the Germans regard him as the Mephistopheles of the "Faust" of Armageddon—scoffing, sardonic, crafty, fiendish. One of their appellations for him is "Satan." They feign to believe—possibly do believe—that his main object in life has been to brew trouble, to bring about war, especially to effect the strangulation, or asphyxiation, of Germany. This of a man of the most civilised type, broad of vision, nurtured in Liberalism, a fly fisherman, a tamer of birds and squirrels, a life-long protagonist of peace !

“What do you mean by the phrase, ‘destruction of Prussian militarism’?” I asked Sir Edward.

THE PRUSSIAN IDEAL.

“What Prussia proposes, as we understand her, is Prussian supremacy. She proposes a Europe modelled and ruled by Prussians. She is to dispose of the liberties of her neighbours, and of us all. We say that life on these terms is intolerable. And this also is what France and Italy and Russia say. We are not only fighting Prussia’s attempt to do, in this instance, to all of Europe what she did to non-Prussian Germany, but fighting the German idea of the wholesomeness, almost the desirability, of ever-recurrent war. Prussia under Bismarck deliberately and admittedly made three wars. We wanted a settled peace in Europe and throughout the world, which will be a guarantee against aggressive war.

“Germany’s philosophy is that a settled peace spells disintegration, degeneracy, the sacrifice of the heroic qualities in human character. Such a philosophy, if it is to survive as a practical force, means eternal apprehension and unrest. It means ever-increasing armaments. It means arresting the development of mankind along the lines of culture and humanity.

THE BRITISH IDEAL.

“ We are fighting this idea. We do not believe in war as the preferable method of settling disputes between nations. When nations cannot see eye to eye, when they quarrel, when there is a threat of war, we believe the controversy should be settled by methods other than those of war. Such other methods are always successful when there is goodwill and no aggressive spirit.

“ We believe in negotiation. We have faith in international conferences. We proposed a conference before this war broke out. We urged Germany to agree to a conference. Germany declined to do so. Then I requested Germany to select some form of mediation, some method of peaceful settlement, of her own. She would not come forward with any such suggestion. Then the Emperor of Russia proposed to Germany to send the dispute to the Hague Tribunal. There was no response. Our proposal of a conference was rejected by Germany : Russia, France and Italy all accepted it. Our proposal that Germany suggest some means of peaceful settlement met with no success, nor did the Czar’s proposal of arbitration. No impartial judgment of any kind was to be permitted to enter. It was a case of Europe submitting to the Teutonic will, or going to war.

“ If the Conference in London in the Balkan crisis in 1912–13 had been worked to the disadvantage of Germany or her allies, the German reluctance for a conference in 1914 would have been intelligible, but no more convincing pledge of fair play and single-minded desire for fair settlement than the conduct of that Conference in London was ever given. And in 1914, after Serbia had accepted nine-tenths of Austria’s demands, the settlement of outstanding questions would have been easy. Russia ordered no general mobilization till Germany had refused a conference and till German preparations for war were far ahead of the Russians. Germany declared war on Russia when Austria was showing every disposition to come to terms ; and Germany was in fact at war with Russia four or five days before Austria, though the quarrel at that time was one that primarily concerned Austria and not Germany.”

THE TWO METHODS.

After a moment’s reflection, Sir Edward continued :

“ These two methods of settling international disputes—the method of negotiation and the method of war—I ask you to consider in the light of this struggle. Do we not see the disaster of the war method conclusively shown ? How much better would have been a conference,

or The Hague, in 1914, than what has happened since ! Industry and commerce dislocated ; the burdens of life heavily increased ; millions of men slain, maimed, blinded ; international hatreds deepened and intensified ; the very fabric of civilization menaced—these from the war method. The conference we proposed, or The Hague proposed by the Czar, would have settled the quarrel in a little time—I think a conference would have settled it in a week—and all these calamities would have been averted. Moreover—a thing of vast importance—we should have gone a long way in laying the permanent foundations for international peace.”

NEUTRALS AND PEACE.

“Do you think neutrals ever will be able to help towards peace ?” I inquired.

“The injustice done by this war has got to be set right. The Allies can tolerate no peace that leaves the wrongs of this war unredressed. When persons come to me with pacific counsels, I think they should tell me what sort of peace they have in mind. They should let me know on which side they stand, for the opponents do not agree. If they think, for example, that Belgium was innocent of offence ; that she has been unspeakably wronged ; that she should be set up again by those who tore her down,

then, it seems to me, they should say so. Peace counsels that are purely abstract and make no attempt to discriminate between the rights and the wrongs of this war are ineffective, if not irrelevant.”

“ ‘ Desire for conquest, lust for revenge, and jealousy of the economic competitor in the world market,’ ” I reminded Sir Edward, “ were suggested by Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg as ‘ the three driving forces of the coalition against Germany before the war.’ ”

“ There was no coalition against Germany before the war,” answered Sir Edward. “ Germany knew there was no coalition against her. We had assured her, in the most formal and categorical way, that in no circumstances would we be a party to any aggression against her. She wanted us to pledge ourselves to unconditional neutrality—wanted us to declare that no matter what she did on the Continent we should not interfere. It is true that she always referred to a possible war forced on her. The trouble was that she gave us no test of a war forced on her. She remained free to claim that any war was forced on her. She now claims that this war was forced on her. I need hardly remind you that at the outset Italy, the third member of the Triple Alliance, definitely refused to accept this view. No one

thought of attacking Germany ; there was not a measure taken by any other power that was not purely defensive ; the German preparations were for attack and were far ahead of others on the Continent.”

BELGIUM A BULWARK.

“ You observed the German Chancellor’s recent reference to Belgium as a ‘ bulwark ’ ? ”

“ Belgium *was* a bulwark—defensive of Germany, of France, and of European peace. This bulwark, until Germany decided to make war, was in no danger from any quarter. In April, 1913, we had given renewed assurance to Belgium to respect her neutrality. When war threatened, we asked France if she would adhere to her pledge to respect the neutrality of Belgium. She said ‘ Yes.’ We asked Germany the same question, and she declined to answer. Immediately afterwards, in scorn of her signature, she assaulted and destroyed the bulwark. Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg acknowledged the wrong, pleading that ‘ necessity knows no law,’ and promised that as soon as Germany’s military aims were realised she would restore Belgium. Now he says there can be no *status quo ante*, either in the East or in the West. In other words, Belgium’s independence is gone, as Serbia’s and Montenegro’s are gone, unless the Allies can set them up again.

“ To all this we say to Germany, ‘ Recognise the principle urged by lovers of freedom everywhere : give to the nationalities of Europe a real freedom, not the so-called freedom doled out to subject peoples by Prussian tyranny, and make reparation as far as it can be made for the wrong done.’ ”

BRITISH AIMS.

“ Should you mind indicating the object of Britain’s rapprochements in recent years ? ” I asked.

“ Good relations and an end to quarrels with other powers. Going far back, we had working relations with the Triple Alliance. But we were habitually in friction with France or Russia. Again and again it brought us to the verge of war. So we decided to come to an arrangement with France, and then with Russia—not with any hostile intent towards Germany, or any other power, but wholly to pave the way to permanent peace. So, instead of preparing for war, as Germany asserts, without a vestige of truth to support the assertion, we were endeavouring to avoid war. And German statesmen knew we were endeavouring to avoid war and not to make it.”

“ German statesmen assert that England is the only real obstacle to peace.”

“ Nobody wants peace more than we want it. But we want a peace that does justice, and a peace that re-establishes respect for the public law of the world. Presumably Germany would like neutrals to think we are applying pressure to keep France, Russia and Italy in the war. We are not. France, Russia and Italy need no urging to keep them in the war. They know why they are in the war. They know they are in it to preserve everything that is precious to nationality. It is this knowledge which makes them determined and unconquerable. It is quite impossible for me to express to you our admiration of the achievements of our associates in this struggle. And as is the measure of our admiration, so also will be the measure of our contribution to the common cause.

“ There are two statements that come from German sources. One is that we are preventing the Allies from making peace—that goes to the address of neutrals. The other is that we are meditating separate peace with Germany and intend to abandon our Allies—that goes to the address of one or other of the Allies. Each statement is absolutely untrue.”

“ You have noted that Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg affirms that Britain wants to destroy ‘ united and free Germany.’ ”

“ We never were smitten with any such madness. We want nothing of the sort, and Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg knows we want nothing of the sort. We should be glad to see the German people free, as we ourselves want to be free, and as we want the other nationalities of Europe and of the world to be free. It belongs to the rudiments of political science, it is abundantly taught by history, that you cannot enslave a people, and make a success of the job—that you cannot kill a people’s soul by foreign despotism and brutality. We aspire to embark upon no such course of folly and futility towards another nation. We believe that the German people—when once the dreams of world-empire, cherished by pan-Germanism are brought to nought—will insist upon the control of its government ; and in this lies the hope of secure freedom and national independence in Europe. For a German democracy will not plot and plan wars, as Prussian militarism plotted wars, to take place at a chosen date in the future.”

In the midst of war, Sir Edward Grey’s great vision remains a vision of peace—not a wobbly peace, not a peace vulnerable to political and militarist intrigue and ambition, but a peace secured by the unified and armed purpose of civilization. Long before this war, Sir Edward

hoped for a league of nations that would be united, quick and instant, to prevent, and, if need be, to punish violation of international treaties, of public right, of national independence, and would say to nations that come forward with grievances and claims, "Put them before an impartial tribunal. Subject your claims to the test of law or the judgment of impartial men. If you can win at this bar, you will get what you want; if you cannot, you shall not have what you want; and, if you attempt to start a war, we all shall adjudge you the common enemy of humanity, and treat you accordingly. As footpads, safe-breakers, burglars, and incendiaries are suppressed *in* nations, so those who would commit these crimes, and incalculably more than these crimes, will be suppressed *among* nations."

LESSON OF THE WAR.

"Unless mankind learns from this war to avoid war," said Sir Edward, in conclusion, "the struggle will have been in vain. Furthermore, it seems to me that over humanity will loom the menace of destruction. The Germans have thrown the door wide open to every form of attack upon human life. The use of poisonous fumes, or something akin to them in war, was recommended to our naval or military authorities

many years ago, and was rejected by them as too horrible for civilized peoples to use. The Germans have come with floating mines in the open seas, threatening belligerents and neutrals equally; they have come with the indiscriminating, murderous Zeppelin, which does military damage only by accident; they have come with the submarine, which destroys neutral and belligerent ships and crews in scorn alike of law and of mercy; they have come upon blameless nations with invasion and incendiarism and confiscation; they have come with poisonous gases and liquid fire. All their scientific genius has been dedicated to wiping out human life. They have forced these things into general use in war. If the world cannot organise against war, if war must go on, then nations can protect themselves henceforth only by using whatever destructive agencies they can invent, till the resources and inventions of science end by destroying the humanity that they were meant to serve. The Germans assert that their culture is so extraordinarily superior that it gives them a normal right to impose it upon the rest of the world by force. Will the outstanding contribution of Kultur disclosed in this war be such efficiency in slaughter as to lead to wholesale extermination?

“The Prussian authorities have apparently but one idea of peace, an iron peace imposed on other nations by German supremacy. They do not understand that free men and free nations will rather die than submit to that ambition, and that there can be no end to war till it is defeated and renounced.”



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